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Farries, Francis W. 1891

The Transcendent Value of Man.

A SERMON

DELIVERED BEFORE

ST. ANDREW'S SOCIETY

IN

Anox Church, Ottawa.

BY

REV. F. W. FARRIES,

Chaplain of the Society,

ON

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SERMON.

"Till we all come * * * unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."—Eph. 4:13.

In the verses which precede the text, the Apostle enumerates the various officers which the ascending Jesus bestowed upon His Church. As princes on their coronation day dispense with lavish hands gifts upon their subjects, so Jesus "when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." As He ascended from the humiliations of earth to the glory of the heavens, from the cross where through weakness He was crucified, to the throne of all power, on His great coronation day, "He gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, Pastors and Teachers." Some of these officers were extraordinary and temporary, others were ordinary and permanent. For both are His gifts, and He gives them *when* and *how* they can best promote the accomplishment of his plans and purposes. And the Apostle assures us that these officers, as Christ requires them, shall be continued in the Church "until we all come * * * to a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Now, it is evident, from the connection, that the great purpose for which Christ bestowed these officers, whether extraordinary or ordinary, and for which He continues them, is to make man perfect. And as He is possessed of infinite wisdom and power, it is manifest, that these officers, as He gives them, are the very best instrumentalities for the accomplishment of this purpose. With us a second best is frequently the best available, but with Him the very best is always at command. Neither earth nor heaven could afford better instrumentalities than these officers whom Christ gave, to make a "perfect man." But the work of these officers is to preach and teach the Gospel. It is to proclaim Christ as the Son of God, and the only Saviour of sinners. Their whole work is summed up in the words of the great commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." So that the divinely appointed means which these officers are to employ to make a "perfect man" are the preaching of the word and the ministering of the ordinances of the Gospel. They are to preach Christ, to make known to men the incarnation, the life, the death, the resurrection and ascension of Christ. And in the use of

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these means, and of nothing else, they are to labour to make perfect men. They are to proclaim far and wide among the nations, and to every creature that the purpose for which Christ left the throne of glory and came to earth and suffered and died, was not to make a man rich, or great, or honoured, or learned, to bedeck him with stars, and distinguish him with titles, but to make him "a perfect man." Now, these facts reveal not only the great purpose of Christ and his infinite love and grace, but also the inestimable value which He puts upon man. There is no object for whose attainment He has made such sacrifices, and appointed such varied and costly instrumentalities and means, as He has to make "a perfect man." In the light of his redemptive work, we read his estimate of a man. The cross proclaims that there is nothing that transcends a man in value. And to awaken in man the sense of his own value, He propounds the momentous question, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Christ knows of nothing in all the world so valuable as man. And this is the truth, *the transcendent value of man*, to which I ask your attention this evening.

I may state, in passing, that in the last clause of the verse the Apostle defines what he means by "a perfect man." "A perfect man" is one who has attained "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." We may not be able to apprehend all that is contained in this phrase which is so rich with suggestions of supernal blessedness. But to measure up to the stature of the fulness of Christ cannot mean less than likeness to Christ. "We shall be like Him," says John, "for we shall see Him as he is." A perfect man is therefore a Christ-like man. A man who bears the image of Christ.

With this explanatory remark, we proceed to consider the truth, which shines out from the text, "the transcendent value of man." And first let us notice a few of the ways in which the transcendent value of man is presented in the Word of God. The Bible begins with an account of the creation of all things, and in this account it is manifest that there is an enormous upward stretch from the highest animal creation to man. Man is separated and elevated above every other creature by the whole breadth and height of the rational and spiritual nature which is his peculiar possession. Man is not only the last but the greatest of all the works of creation. He alone was made in the image and likeness of God. To him alone was given the dominion over all the creatures on earth, in sea or air. Because he was made in the likeness of God he was worthy to have rule. From the plastic hands of the Creator man came forth, bearing the image of God, to crown the summit of Creation's work. In his creation, God put the stamp of a transcendent value upon man. And in the government of the world he makes it manifest that it is not for his wealth, his honors, his power and splendour that he esteems and values man, but for what he is in himself. When he chose a people whom he called his own, and among whom he covenanted to dwell, he passed by the mighty king-

doms, the glittering royalties, the conquering nations, and laid hold upon a race of slaves, and took them to be his peculiar people. He identified himself with them. He proclaimed himself "the God of Israel," and Israel was in Egypt under the yoke of bondage. He took David from the sheep-fold to make him king over his people Israel. The Psalmist proclaimed a marked characteristic of his government when he sang, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes, even the princes of the earth." God never values or exalts a man for what he has, but for what he is, and his friendship and favor are especially given to the poor and the needy. The only thing that Christ, the Son of God took as his own, when he came into the world was our nature—He became man. There was nothing else here worth taking. Everything else was and is subservient to man, and of value only as it can minister and is used for man's good. And so Christ did not come to be rich, to dwell in palaces, to sit upon a throne, to win the titles and honors of the world. He had not where to lay his head. He took only our nature, that in the nature that had sinned he might bear the penalty of sin—He died for man. It is in the cross we see the brightest outshining of the love of God—and the whole wealth of that love is given to man—not to the rich, the great, as such, but to man, to every man. On the cross we see the most costly sacrifice that the universe has ever witnessed, and that sacrifice was made for man. God knows the true value of things. He is not deceived by appearances. He does not give a ransom of countless merit for a valueless thing. And so when we can measure the worth, the glory of Christ, and compute the value of his sacrifice, then may we be able to estimate the value which God puts upon man to whom that Son was given, and for whom that sacrifice was made. And the end which God seeks in all this wonderful work of Christ, in all the offices and ordinances of the Church, and in all the means of grace, and in his whole government of the world, still further, if it is possible, impresses us with the transcendent value of man. His whole purpose is to conform man, not to the likeness of an angel, but "to the image of his Son." Genius with her lofty ideals, and her skilled hand, has often taxed her powers to the utmost to give us, in costly marble, or on glowing canvas, the image or likeness of Christ. But when God would give us an image of Christ, he takes a man, and by his spirit and grace moulds him into the likeness of his Son. There is nothing in the universe but a man capable, in God's judgment, of bearing the likeness of his Son. And when his gracious end is completed in the man he takes him to glory. He crowns him with blessedness and triumphant joy. Through grace and providence he is working and will work, "until we all come * * * unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." And then, as nothing befits "a perfect man," but a crown, and sceptre and royal robes, he raises him to the skies to sit with Christ on his throne. Now, through all these facts, at which we have but glanced,

there shine, not only the infinite love and grace of God, but his judgment of the transcendent worth of man. And this judgment of man's transcendent worth is not a mere sentiment, a barren speculation, a pleasing dream, it is a principle or law to which he gives practical effect in dealing with individuals and nations.

And, hence, in the second place, we notice that the individual or nation that does not recognize, and accept and act upon this judgment shall perish. If a man will not accept God's estimate of his worth, and will not walk in the way of obedience to God which leads to perfection, if he will not heed his call, and resists the spirit and grace by which God is seeking to mould him into the image of his Son, he shall certainly perish. If a man refuses to be governed by the truth, and makes himself the slave of lust, and passion, and sin, if he makes gold, or honours, or titles, or pleasures, and not perfect manhood, the object of all his efforts, if he so degrades his being as to leave his Father's house to feed with swine, and prostitutes his nature, which God desires to bear the image of his Son, in worship to an idol, a graven image, preferring the lie that enslaves, to the truth that makes free, that man shall perish without remedy. Once it was a capital offence to deface the image of the sovereign stamped upon a coin. It was counted an act of treason. It is always a law of the Divine government, that the man who erases the last lingering lineaments of the divine from his nature, and resists the spirit and grace by which God is seeking to conform him "unto the image of his Son," shall perish. He is guilty of treason against God. He forfeits eternal life. And so Christ, in the Proverbs, affirms what is literally and terribly true. "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul."

And this is true of nations as well as individuals. For the history of the world is strewn with the wrecks of nations who ignored God's estimate of the value of man, in the conduct of their national affairs. The civilization of the three great ancient empires, Babylon, Assyria and Egypt presents some points of difference, but in their estimate of the worth of man these nations were substantially alike. The deepest conviction of their national life was that the stability and permanence and prosperity of nations depend upon the vastness of their territory, the richness and variety of their material resources, the strength of their armies, the grandeur and magnificence of their cities and palaces. And so they conquered peoples and took their gold for plunder, and led the multitude who escaped their swords, in chains to grace their triumphal processions. They built great cities, Babylon with its surrounding wall, 60 miles in length, 80 feet in thickness and 350 feet in height. And within their massive walls they reared palaces and temples and hanging gardens that for splendour and magnificence seem to belong to the region of imagination rather than to that of accomplished fact. But through all the splendour and costliness of their palaces and temples and pyramids, through the tumultuous enthusiasms of their triumphal processions, we hear the groans and sighs and wails of the

millions who toiled to erect them, whose spirits were crushed, whose manhood was outraged by the despotisms that tore from them their rights of manhood, and doomed them to slavery. Man was crushed and degraded into a beast of burden, and was counted for nothing, excepting as he was able to contribute to the erection of these national works, and add to their material splendour. Herodotus tells us that 100,000 men were constantly engaged for twenty years in building one of the pyramids of Egypt. But the divine law took effect on Babylon and Assyria and Egypt, and they fell. They thought less of a man than they did of a palace, or a pyramid, or a hanging garden. And God overthrew them, plunged them into a ruin from which they never arose.

Other forms of civilization appeared in Greece and Rome, but neither did they apprehend the true purpose of national existence nor the divine secret of national permanence and prosperity. Greece had her sages, her statesmen, her poets and artists and heroes unrivalled. She wrote the Iliad, she conquered Egypt, she built the Parthenon, and fell. Rome rose on the ruins of Greece to the mastery of the world. She had her wisdom, her courage, her conquering eagles, her art and enterprise, her magnitude and magnificence. But Rome, like Greece, fell. These nations did not rightly value living men, they did not realize that the true end of national power is to help men upwards towards perfect manhood, and they withered out of existence by the inevitable law of God.

And in modern times, God had a controversy with Britain, until, at the cost of millions, she purchased liberty for her slaves. God had a controversy with the United States, until at the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of her free born sons, and millions of treasure, she struck the fetters from her four millions of slaves and made them free men and recognized their manhood. And Russia shall find no peace until her despotism ceases to crowd thousands of exiles into Siberia to suffer and die, and sheathes the bloody sword of persecution in its scabbard. God is on the side of the rights of a man. He hears the cry of the poor and needy and oppressed, and when a nation thinks more of its palaces and temples and pyramids, more of its material wealth and power, more of its railroads, mines and manufactories than it does of a man, it shall be overturned. If it fails to perceive the everlasting truth that nations are not made strong and stable by the breadth of their territory, the splendour of their cities, and the wealth of their material resources, but by the quality and character of their men, and that true manhood can only be realized by working in harmony with the Divine principle whose aim and end are to make perfect men, and help them grow up "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;" it shall sink into the ruin that has engulfed so many nations in the past. A nation that degrades or discounts God's estimate of man cannot live.

Thirdly, notice that in the measure in which nations have recognized and acted upon God's estimate of a man, they have risen in

the scale of manhood and become leaders in the march of human progress. Time will not permit me to dwell on such illustrations as the history of the Israelites, the Huguenots of France, the Puritans of England afford, I will refer especially, as befitting the present occasion, to our Scottish forefathers. It is evident that when the truth dawned upon Scotland it wrought these convictions with increasing force into the hearts of the people, first, that God's word and not material wealth and splendour, is the only true foundation of a nation's permanence and prosperity. Secondly, that personal freedom and liberty of conscience are the necessary conditions of a nation's acceptance of the word of God as the only rule of their faith and practice. Thirdly, that to realize the character which God's word required them to possess, that is, to become "perfect men," to grow up unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, is the chief and highest duty of men, and that all the business of life and all the affairs of their country should be conducted with a view to promote this end. They believed that individual and national life could not prosper when its aim and purpose were different from the aim and purpose of God in providence and grace. And so they struggled and suffered and died to win liberty, to work in harmony with God and toward the same end for which he is working. As God has revealed to us that his great purpose in all that he has done and is doing in providence and grace, is to conform men to the image of his Son, to make perfect men, with hearts strong to dare and do, they resolved to devote all to this same end, and to be co-workers with God. This was the liberty, by whatever name men may call it, for which our forefathers struggled and suffered through long centuries of oppression and martyrdom. They did not wish to substitute the Church of God for country. They always maintained that Church and State were separate and independent governments, but they were penetrated with the conviction that they were "doing their best for their country when they were doing their best for the Church of God. They felt in doing so that they were not only working in harmony with God but doing their best to quicken and strengthen all the elements and forces which give permanence and prosperity to a nation." And as Hetherington says: "In defence of that sacred principle, they 'endured a great fight of afflictions,' through which they were triumphantly borne by the mighty power of God, unfolding and realizing in the fearful struggle, what, though of subordinate importance, was still of inestimable value, that noblest charter of civil liberty which man has ever framed, the British Constitution." And thus by their heroic struggles, and suffered martyrdoms, they won a character which commands the admiration of the ages, they planted in the hearts of Scotia's sons a love of freedom which time can never quench, and whose quickening breath is felt to earth's remotest bounds. They fought for the rights of man—to give man the liberty and right to be a co-worker with God in attaining perfect manhood, in attaining the image of Christ. They valued man above everything else. They

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shook off the hand of the despot, they broke the fetters of ecclesiastical tyranny that man might be free, free to use all things and make them contribute to his manhood. Our great bard but caught the spirit that beats in Scottish hearts, and breathes through all our native land, free as the winds that sweep her heathery hills or the waves that beat on her rocky shores when he sang :

“What tho’ on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hodden gray, and a’ that ;
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
A man’s a man for a’ that ;
For a’ that, and a’ that
Their tinsel show, and a’ that ;
The honest man, though e’er sae poor,
Is king o’ men for a’ that

You see yon birkie ca’d a lord,
Wha struts and stares, and a’ that,
Tho’ hundreds worship at his word,
He’s but a coof for a’ that ;
For a’ that, and a’ that,
His riband, star, and a’ that ;
The rank is but the guinea’s stamp.
The man’s the gowd for a that.

A prince can mak’ a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a’ that ;
But an honest man’s aboon his might
Guid faith he mauna fa’ that !
For a’ that, and a’ that,
Their dignities, and a’ that,
The pith o’ sense, and pride o’ worth,
Are higher ranks than a’ that.”

Thus the divine truth that “man is of transcendent value” that inspired and nerved the hearts of our forefathers, lives in our native land, and breathes in our national songs, and is stirring the peoples of the earth to aspire after a higher manhood, to grow into the “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

There is no time to apply this great truth to our own position in this new land, where with our fellow-citizens of all nationalities we are seeking to build up our country in true greatness. I can but say that this can be done only by accepting and acting upon the divine principle that the good of man, and not material wealth, or magnificence must be the chief aim of our national life, and that in this great work of building up our country according to the divine rule, Scotchmen who are the heirs of so grand a history, and of such a noble ancestry, should play no unworthy part. The whole force of our national life impels us

to take our stand for God and truth and the well-being of man. "There is an heirloom of stimulus to a whole race in the heroic acts of those who have bequeathed them a name among the nations of the world." And none have better reason to feel that stimulus than the sons and daughters of the martyr heroes of Scotland. And so while cherishing in our inmost hearts the memory of our native land, and glorying in its heroic history, let us remember that our heritage of liberty and truth is the birthright of all. And so live and labour as to lift up others and make them free to be co-workers with God in striving for perfect manhood. There is nothing narrow or national in the gospel. Its blessings, its salvation are free to all. And there is nothing narrow in the heroic martyr-spirit of our forefathers. For the dying Covenanter, as he sank among the heather of his native hills, saw not only a vision of the splendour and glories of the new Jerusalem, his eternal home, but also the vision of a righteous and holy Scotland, radiant with the light of God's favor, and beyond that the world redeemed and won to Christ, and filled with his glory, and the earthly scene was scarcely less enrapturing to his passing and triumphing spirit than the heavenly. So let our eyes dwell upon the vision of the promised time, for which the martyr heroes of Scotland and the good and true of every land and age have laboured and longed, when the knowledge of God, and of his estimate of man shall fill the earth, when all men shall seek to be like Christ, and all men shall be linked together in the bonds of a loving brotherhood.

"Then let us pray that come it may,
 As come it will for a' that,
 That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,
 May bear the gree, and a' that ;
 For a' that, and a' that,
 It's coming yet, for a' that,
 When man to man, the world o'er
 Shall brothers be for a' that."

"Until we all come * * * unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

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